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Standards of accommodation for air travel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998 and is submitted in accordance with General Assembly decisions 44/442 of 21 December 1989 and 46/450 of 20 December 1991, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit annual reports on standards of accommodation for air travel. As also requested by the Assembly in its decision 40/455 of 18 December 1985 and section XIII of its resolution 45/248 A of 21 December 1990, respectively, information is included on expenditures by the United Nations for first-class air travel and relevant exceptions.

2. During the period under review, standards of accommodation for air travel were governed by General Assembly resolution 42/214 of 21 December 1987, in which the Assembly decided that all individuals, with the exception of the Secretary-General and the heads of delegations of the least developed countries to the regular and special sessions of the Assembly, whose travel was financed by United Nations organizations and programmes and who had been previously entitled to first-class accommodation, would be required to travel at the class immediately below first class. In the same resolution, the Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to exercise his discretion in making exceptions to allow first-class travel on a case-by-case basis.

II. Delegation travel

3. General Assembly resolution 42/214 limits the payment of first-class accommodation by air to one representative of each Member State designated as a least developed country attending the regular and special sessions of the Assembly. For the fifty-second session, for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998 claims submitted to date involved 30 such journeys at a cost of $156,028. No such claims were submitted in regard to the nineteenth special session. Two claims for such travel relating to the twentieth special session of the Assembly have been submitted for a total of $11,381.00.

III. Exceptions authorized by the Secretary-General

4. As stated above, in General Assembly resolution 42/214, the Secretary-General was authorized to exercise his discretion in making exceptions to allow first-class air travel on a case-by-case basis. In addition, business-class travel by air may be authorized by the Secretary-General in certain circumstances, in accordance with administrative instruction ST/AI/249/Rev.3 of 29 March 1989.

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5. Generally, in reviewing cases that may warrant an exception, the Secretary-General takes into consideration the following circumstances:

(a) A medical condition may exist necessitating a level of comfort not available in the normal standard of accommodation to which the traveller is entitled. Such cases are referred to the Director of the Medical Services Division of the Secretariat for recommendation. It should be noted that the practice of granting exceptions in cases where a traveller is of an advanced age has been discontinued;

(b) The normal standard of accommodation is not available and, owing to the exigencies of the service, the traveller is required to travel on a particular date. Cases also arise where accommodation at the normal entitlement is not available and the cost of daily subsistence allowance, while waiting for the next available seat, would be greater than the higher standard of travel;

(c) The traveller is considered an eminent person, such as a former head of State, or a prominent figure in political, humanitarian or cultural areas;

(d) The traveller is a prominent person who is donating his or her services free of charge to the Organization, and, in some cases, at a loss of personal income. Such individuals may be accorded the standard of accommodation that they normally use when travelling;

(e) The traveller, after completing a full day of work, is required to travel through the night in order to resume work, attend meetings or present a paper at another location on the following morning or immediately upon arrival. Where such cases involve arduous journeys, it has been deemed reasonable that the standard of accommodation accorded to the traveller should provide the best rest possible while travelling, or provide the conditions most conducive to work while flying, or both.

6. On 18 March 1998, the Secretary-General decided, as an exception, that all travel of the Deputy Secretary-General should be in first class, in keeping with her special status. As regards practical arrangements, efforts first are made to obtain upgrades to first class against payment of the full business-class fare. Where this is not feasible, the first-class fare is paid. During the reporting period, three such journeys were carried out at a total additional cost of $6,299.

7. In respect of exceptions to air travel authorized during the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998 owing to the circumstances described in paragraph 5 above, the present report provides, in annexes I to V, detailed information as to the additional cost of, and reasons for, such exceptions.

8. Altogether, for travel during the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998, the Secretary-General exercised his discretion by authorizing, as an exception, 24 cases of first-class air travel. In addition, during the same period, the Secretary-General authorized business-class travel by air as an exception to the standards of accommodation in 31 cases. These 55 exceptions amount to 0.16 per cent of the total of about 35,000 official journeys completed for the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations funds and programmes during the reporting period.

9. It should be noted that, in accordance with the established practice to ensure personal safety, the Secretary-General was accompanied on all trips during the period under review by a personal aide/security officer who travelled by air in first class. The total additional cost of 13 such trips was $34,347.

10. The total additional cost incurred by the Organization for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998 was $81,837, or 0.08 per cent of the total of approximately $107 million of official travel expenditures of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations funds and programmes during the same period.

11. While continuous administrative oversight kept the number of exceptions at a minimum, it should be noted that in certain cases they are unavoidable. For example, exceptions owing to the lack of availability of regular standards are dictated by the exigencies of specific situations and, therefore, their number cannot be kept constant or be forced to decrease without hampering the efficiency of the traveller's missions. Moreover, in many cases, to compel a traveller to wait until the established standard of travel becomes available would result in extra costs for the Organization for the daily subsistence allowance over and above the cost of an upgrade; an upgrade therefore remains the only cost-effective option.

Table 1
Summary of exceptions, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998
(Cost in United States dollars)

Reasons for exceptions	First class		Business class		Total	
	Number of trips	Additional cost	Number of trips	Additional cost	Number of trips	Additional cost
Medical condition	1	130	8	6 943	9	7 073
Regular standard of accommodation not available	4	4 825	6	4 867	10	9 692
Eminent persons	0	0	9	6 375	9	6 375
Donating services free of charge to the Organization	3	9 197	6	8 354	9	17 551
Arduous journeys	0	0	2	500	2	500
Personal aides/security officer	13	34 347	0	0	13	34 347
Deputy Secretary-General	3	6 299	0	0	3	6 299
Total	**24**	**54 798**	**31**	**27 039**	**55**	**81 837**

Table 2
Summary of exceptions, 1 July 1996–30 June 1997[a]
(Cost in United States dollars)

Reasons for exceptions	First class		Business class		Total	
	Number of trips	Additional cost	Number of trips	Additional cost	Number of trips	Additional cost
Medical condition	0	0	3	1 045	3	1 045
Regular standard of accommodation not available	5	622	4	731	9	1 353
Eminent persons	2	3 300	12	2 984	14	6 284
Donating services free of charge to the Organization	6	13 017	4	4 646	10	17 663
Arduous journeys	1	1 221	0	0	1	1 221
Personal aides/security officer	11	26 737	—	—	11	26 737
Total	**25**	**44 897**	**23**	**9 406**	**48**	**54 303**

[a] Owing to typographical errors, the data on the total number of exceptions due to the regular standard of accommodation, as well as on the exceptions due to arduous journeys, as they appeared in the same table on page 4 of A/52/517, were not correct. The current table presents the correct data.

Annex I

Exceptions authorized owing to medical condition, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998

Designation of traveller	*Itinerary*	*Additional cost (United States dollars)*
A. First class		
Staff member, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Dakar/Abidjan	130
Subtotal		**130**
B. Business class		
1. Staff member, International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction	Geneva/New York/Geneva	925
2. Staff member, International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction	Geneva/New York/Geneva	120
3. Participant, Secretary-General's Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements	Cairo/Bonn/Cairo	516
4. Participant, Secretary-General's Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements	Cairo/Geneva/Cairo	355
5. Member, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)	London/Washington/London	2 550
6. Member, STAP	London/Amsterdam/London	65
7. Member, STAP	London/Washington/London	2 361
8. Staff member, UNICEF	Abidjan/Dakar	51
Subtotal		**6 943**
Total		**7 073**

Annex II

Exceptions authorized when the regular standard of accommodation was not available, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998

Designation of traveller	*Itinerary*[a]	*Additional cost (United States dollars)*
A. First class		
1. Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	.../London/New York	3 960
2. Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva	.../Cairo/Geneva	336
3. Participant, Workshop by Convention to Combat Desertification	Algiers/Bamako/...	400
4. Staff member, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	.../Ouagadougou/Cairo/Asmara	129
Subtotal		**4 825**
B. Business class		
1. Staff member, UNDP	New York/Geneva/New York	985
2. Staff member, UNDP	Dakar/New York	550
3. Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Office of Project Services	Geneva/New York	1 593
4. Staff member, UNDP	New York/Dakar	550
5. Consultant, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	.../Dhaka/Bangkok/...	89
6. Staff member, UNDP	New York/Amsterdam/ Geneva/Amsterdam/...	1 100
Subtotal		**4 867**
Total		**9 692**

[a] The points of ellipses in a given itinerary indicate that some legs of the itinerary were by regular standard of accommodation and no exception was involved.

Annex III

Exceptions authorized for eminent persons, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998

Designation of traveller	*Itinerary*	*Additional cost (United States dollars)*
A. First class		
None		—
Subtotal		—
B. Business class		
Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People/European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine		
1. Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations and Member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People	New York/Brussels/New York	2 938
Subtotal		**2 938**
Meeting on Global Public Goods and Development Cooperation		
2. Former Under-Secretary-General	Paris/New York/Paris	2 495
Subtotal		**2 495**
Meeting of the UNDP Advisory Board of Mayors		
3. Mayor of San Francisco	San Francisco/New York/San Francisco	470
Subtotal		**470**
UNDP Global Governance Conference		
4. Former Deputy Prime Minister, Poland	Warsaw/New York/Warsaw	28
Subtotal		**28**
Resident Representatives meeting in Beirut		
5. Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Bahrain	Bahrain/Beirut/Bahrain	112
6. Minister of Economic Development, Tunisia	Tunis/Beirut/Tunis	107
7. Minister of Rural Development, Egypt	Cairo/Beirut/Cairo	57
Subtotal		**276**
Workshop on Values and Governance in Asia		
8. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand	Bangkok/Kuala Lumpur/Bangkok	31
9. Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research	New Delhi/Kuala Lumpur/New Delhi	137
Subtotal		**168**
Total, B		**6 375**
Grand total, A and B		**6 375**

Annex IV

Exceptions authorized for prominent persons donating their services free of charge to the Organization, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998

Designation of traveller	*Itinerary*[a]	*Additional cost (United States dollars)*
A. First class		
1. UNICEF Special Representative	New York/London/New York	6 025
2. UNICEF Special Representative	.../London/Mexico/.../Montreal/London/...	1 784
Fourteenth Meeting of Experts on United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance		
3. Prime Minister, Namibia	Windhoek/New York/Windhoek	1 388
Total, A		**9 197**
B. Business class		
Meeting on Human Rights in Negotiating Process		
1. Former Foreign Minister, Norway	Oslo/New York/Oslo	459
2. Magistrat, Court de Cassation, France	Paris/New York/Paris	1 358
Subtotal		**1 817**
Experts Meeting on Lessons Learned, Department of Peacekeeping Operations		
3. Executive Director, United Nations International Civilian Mission in Haiti	Port-au-Prince/New York/ Port-au-Prince	540
4. Former Assistant Secretary-General	Frankfurt/New York/Frankfurt	2 177
5. Assistant Commissioner, Police Force of Ireland	Dublin/New York/Dublin	2 369
6. Permanent Representative of Norway to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe	Vienna/New York/Vienna	1 451
Subtotal		**6 537**
Total, B		**8 354**
Grand total, A and B		**17 551**

[a] The points of ellipses in a given itinerary indicate that some legs of the itinerary were by regular standard of accommodation and no exception was involved.

Annex V

Exceptions authorized for cases involving arduous journey, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998

Designation of traveller	*Itinerary*[a]	*Additional cost (United States dollars)*
A. First class		
None		—
Subtotal		—
B. Business class		
1. Consultant, United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS)	.../Dakar/Paris/...	161
2. Staff member, UNOPS	New York/Amsterdam/...	339
Subtotal		**500**
Total		**500**

[a] The points of ellipses in a given itinerary indicate that some legs of the itinerary were by regular standard of accommodation and no exception was involved.

Annex VI

Exceptions relating to the travel of the Deputy Secretary-General, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998

Reason for exception/designation of traveller	*Itinerary*	*Additional cost (United States dollars)*
First class		
Deputy Secretary-General	New York/Geneva /London/New York	5 021
Deputy Secretary-General	New York/Geneva/Paris/Ouagadougou/New York	1 008
Deputy Secretary-General	New York/St Lucia/New York	270
Total		**6 299**